



Errors of Bravado

The candidate who makes these errors is like a driver who goes so fast they miss their turning. They do not think the world has any right to judge and select such a star as themselves, or they are simply sloppy and unprofessional, assuming their luck will always hold...

Truth stretching is the worst possible error. Seasoned recruiters can immediately feel whether or not a document has the ring of truth and they can easily check up on basic facts. If they pin you down at interview, should you get that far, you will be crucified.

Reverse truth stretching is something you should also be aware of: do not undersell yourself and if your testimonials or referees are likely to damn you with faint praise choose a source that can be relied upon to say something positive that reflects you at the right professional level.

Laziness is a cousin of truth stretching. The spell check will not find all your mistakes and the grammar check is useless because a CV has no conventional sentence-paragraph structure. You need proof reading, and again, and a few opinions and tests – before you come anywhere near the perfect CV.

Grammar all to pot: laziness shows most of all in the CVs of people who copy the Americanised template in their WP program and who don't even bother to change the spell check to British English. If you do not know what grammar is correct, get a book on the subject and compensate yourself for the discovery-method teaching that failed you at school. It should be Yours faithfully in a letter, by the way, unless you know the addressee well enough to use their first name, i.e. you have actually spoken to them.

Flashy CV designs are 100% guaranteed to hit the rubbish bin immediately. Unless you are a model or a customer-facing person or based in Singapore do not even think about using a photograph. Avoid text effects, colours, boxes and unusual fonts because the recruiter simply cannot process them.

Follow this rule if you want your CV to succeed: keep the appearance simple because it is the quality of the content that resonates with recruiters and makes them want to meet you. No bravado will ever impress them – they have seen every gimmick in the book and they are sick of looking at them twenty times a day.

Errors Born of Fear

Just as damning for the candidate is a CV that plays so safe that it gives out negative messages about your intelligence and ability to communicate. You may be feeling desperate or just cautious about your application but at some point you must shoulder the risk involved and go the extra mile to write a CV that makes you stand out.

The lemming approach never works. Lemmings rush to do the same as everyone else. They ask what should a CV be like in the hope of finding some perfect pattern that is bound to work. There is no such animal; being the candidate who gets the job is about standing out from the crowd, about being different in an acceptable and professional way. This individual gets the job that the safe players miss out on.

Badly worded information come from the half-baked attempt to make your CV interesting by adding in some 'achievements' without linking them to anything or by swallowing the Thesaurus to pump your CV full of 'action words'.

Getting the level wrong will also condemn your CV to the waste bin, especially if you are trying to leverage an upward career movement. You will be judged on how you position yourself at the right level (which is why they so often ask for current salary as a shorthand guide). If your CV is meant to get you a management job but it dwells on minor skills or trivial details from the distant past, the look and feel will be more junior than the role you are after.

It is essential to tap the intuition of the recruiter at the correct level, so that they take the time to understand the more complex and subtle messages you need to communicate. Dwelling on basic, trivial stuff and giving it visual prominence will detract from this mission. The skill here is what I call 'messaging'. Do not claim to have 'good communication skills' but demonstrate those skills by your subtle communication. Do not say you are a team player but include evidence of teamwork in the way you describe your experience.

Example:

You are in name a logistics manager who has also completed some internal change projects that touch on senior areas of management and have enhanced your general business understanding. You would like to move up to a role with general management elements within a supply chain environment....

Do not claim you already are a GM; do not scour the universe for buzzwords and start exaggerating your part in strategic change. Do not just list the number of staff, the figures and the bare results. try to illustrate the process...

Demonstrate that your roles, projects, leadership and planning activities have included all the elements of general management and that you are part of a senior management team to whatever extent. Use your application letter to build on the evidence in your CV that you are ready for a promotion in terms of challenge.

Always be as subtle as life really is. Recruiters want the flavour of your story to come through. Get the level right. Be as professional in writing your own CV as you would in preparing a presentation for a major client. They are both marketing tasks with similar rules. Find those USPs and highlight them.